

## Opening Sentence Techniques: Capturing a Reader's Attention

### Anecdote

*One way to get a reader's attention is to use an anecdote. This is a story that will interest your reader and lead to the point you want to make. Here is a sample introduction that includes an anecdote and the writer's thesis about whether or not lying is ever justifiable:*

On a cold winter evening, Mom and I were baking cookies. We were laughing and carrying on when I asked, "Mom, what would dad say if I wanted to go out with a black guy?" Mom retorted, "Don't even think about mentioning that to your father! He'll kill you! I can't imagine why you'd actually think about doing such a thing..." It was evident to me that I would be forced to keep my relationship with Andre a secret. It was at that moment I knew that my relationship with my parents would change forever. I used to believe that lying to my parents was never acceptable. However, now, I strongly believe lying is justified to protect or support your belief system.

### Dialogue or Quotation Related to Topic

*Another way to get a reader's attention is to use dialogue or a quotation that will interest your reader and lead to the point you want to make. When you use a quotation from the text about which you are writing, be sure to include the speaker and the circumstance somewhere in a follow up sentence so your reader understands the use of the quotation. When you use dialogue, you indent each time another person speaks. Dialogue should bring out the speaker's true voice in order to sound as authentic as possible. Here is a sample introduction that includes dialogue:*

"I can't believe I failed my English class! What am I going to tell my parents?"

"Linda, just hide your report card and tell them that you lost it."

While I value my friendship with my best friend, I no longer value her advice when it comes to my grades. Brenda's words haunt me as I replay the events of the last week. It seemed so easy; just tell my parents I lost my report card. How could such a simple lie turn into such horrible drama?

### Startling Information

*A third way to get a reader's attention is to use startling information that will interest your reader and lead to the point you want to make. This could be an incident, a statistic, or a "sound." Here is a sample introduction that includes a startling opener:*

Brrring! Brrring! The telephone startled me out of my sleep at 11:30 p.m. My mother and I both picked up the phone at the same time. Unknown to her, I listened to the man's voice which casually, without emotion, described my father's fatal accident. After a few seconds of cold silence, I heard the phone crash to the floor as my mother's screams pierced the house. My body instantly filled up with intense fear.

## Opinion

*A fourth way to get a reader's attention is to write an all-commentary introduction that will interest your reader and lead to the point you want to make. Here is a sample introduction that uses opinion:*

Like so many homeless teens, Roger, in the story "Thank You Ma'am," was never taught right from wrong. Not having a parent around to teach a child love and respect causes a kid to grow up with no moral consciousness; this, in fact, was Roger's greatest flaw. Roger consequently makes a bad decision to steal Mrs. Jones's purse. However, little does he know that his run-in with her would change his life forever.

## Controversial or Provocative Question

*A fifth way to get a reader's attention is to pose a question that you know will inspire disagreement or at least curiosity. Here is a sample introduction that uses a question:*

Are you a liar? Are we all liars? Can you honestly say that you have never lied? Can any of us? Such questions remind us that morality and ethics are not black and white; there is a lot of gray area in how we interpret what is right and what is wrong. It is in hindsight that I ponder these questions as I sit in my room eeking out the final days of my restriction for, you guessed it, lying! With this hindsight I have learned that lying to protect myself from consequences I actually deserve is much different than lying to maintain a belief system that will be compromised if I tell the truth. I used to believe that lying to my parents was never acceptable. However, now, I strongly believe lying is justified to protect or support my belief system.

## Definition

*Still another way to get a reader's attention is to start with a definition, especially if your topic is centered on a key term or concept that is complex or unique. Here is a sample introduction that uses definition:*

To understand the intricacies of the rise and fall of communism in the Soviet Union, one must first understand Karl Marx's perspective of communism. Before the Russian Revolution began, Marx encouraged workers to revolt against the noble classes and to start a communist society. A communist society is a system without a government and social classes. Marx suggested that "after classes had been eliminated, everyone would live in peace, prosperity, and freedom. There would be no more need for governments, police, or armies, and all these institutions would gradually disappear." (Urban 890) Given this definition, the revolution should have, ideally, created equality and economic security. However, true communism was never fully achieved in the Soviet Union after the Russian Revolution because of the brutal and harsh dictatorship of Joseph Stalin.

